

Washington, DC – U.S. Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23) filed a bill Tuesday designed to identify and address the ecological impacts of fencing along the border.

The Healthy Borderlands Act of 2009 requires the Department of Homeland Security Secretary to develop a mitigation plan to begin to address ecological impacts of border fencing.

“Our borderlands are rich in natural and cultural resources, but they also can be places for illegal activity,” Congressman Rodriguez said. “This bill is the next logical step in protecting the ecological integrity of our borders while also pursuing the measures necessary to secure our borders and defend our communities.”

Currently, DHS has no program to continuously monitor and mitigate environmental impacts. As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, Congressman Rodriguez worked to provide \$50 million in FY09 to mitigate environmental impacts.

While DHS has agreed to work with the Department of Interior on environmental impacts, it has not initiated a plan to utilize these funds. An additional \$40 million was approved in the House for FY10. In order to ensure these funds go toward fixing and preventing environmental damage caused by border security efforts, a long-term program must be in place.

The mitigation plan will be science-based, incorporate extensive monitoring protocol and be developed in conjunction with state and tribal wildlife agencies and authorities.

Robert L. Bendick, Director of U.S. Government Relations for The Nature Conservancy, applauded the filing of the bill. “This Act will establish a comprehensive, science-based and collaborative approach to ensuring that the ecological impacts of border security measures along our international borders will be comprehensively monitored and that action will be taken to mitigate any such ecological impacts,” Bendick said. “We believe the Act should be supported on a broad, bipartisan basis and look forward to its speedy enactment.”

The bill specifically authorizes DHS funding to be spent on private, state, tribal or federal lands for the purpose of mitigation and allows for those funds to be transferred to other federal agencies as needed.

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